

MENTAL ATTITUDES IN WAR-TIME

THE programme of the general meeting of the British Psychological Society, recently held at Oxford, contained a symposium on "Mental Attitudes in Time of War". Prof. Millais Culpin and Prof. Gilbert Murray took the chair in succession.

Dr. R. H. Thouless spoke on "Hatred of the Enemy". One of the social and psychological results of the situation of being at war is the development of an attitude (or sentiment) of hatred of the enemy. In this sentiment there are the characteristic emotional dispositions of hatred, leading to anger at the enemy's successes and joy at his misfortunes, and the corresponding behaviour impulses to injure and destroy the hated enemy. The existence of such a system of emotional dispositions is not peculiar to this War, but is a feature of all wars; it was strongly developed against the Boers in the South African War and against the French in the Napoleonic Wars.

While this hatred is undoubtedly fostered by propaganda during any time of war, there is no reason for supposing that it is simply a product of propaganda. There are undoubtedly internal causes previously at work in people's minds which serve to make the propaganda of hate effective. The internal causes which have been principally considered by psychological writers have been the instinctive or unconscious forces of human aggressiveness. Upon these, however, have been built a structure of fully conscious ideas which may be strengthened or weakened by the use of conscious methods.

The social psychologist must ask himself if in war-time the sentiment of hate is desirable or undesirable; not only whether it attains immediate special and political ends but also whether it is reasonable and good in itself, that is, furthers permanent social well-being.

On one obvious ground, hatred of the enemy can be defended, namely, its service towards the important and desirable end of defeating the enemy by strengthening the intensity of war-effort and providing a motive for enduring the hardships of war. Against this social gain must be balanced serious social and psychological losses. First, war is a transitory pattern of behaviour, succeeded by the relatively lasting pattern of peaceful co-operation. The continuance of the hatreds of war beyond its end, and their effect on the subsequent peace treaties, is a powerful factor in producing the next war. Secondly, belief in the legend of the hated enemy, which is the conscious aspect of the impulse of hatred, produces an irrational picture of the enemy as altogether evil, with refusal to discriminate between good and bad individuals within the hated group. Examples are Hitler's condemnation of the hated Jews and the condemnation of all 'Germans' by some speakers and writers on our own side. It involves a failure to face the real facts of the war situation, and may be a barrier to our taking advantage of the enemy's disunity. A third way in which hatred of the enemy interferes with a realistic attitude towards the problems of making a lasting peace is the tendency to regard the present hated enemy as the one menace to world peace in the past and in the future. History may show that the hated enemy of the moment was a valued ally in the struggle against another enemy in the past (as were the Prussians in the Napoleonic Wars) and that the aggressor of twenty years hence may be some nation other than the present enemy. The attainment

of a lasting peace cannot, therefore, be expected to be achieved by the mere defeat and disarmament of the present enemy.

The practical results of hatred in prolonging bitterness and making difficult a satisfactory peace may be regarded as secondary consequences of the fact that hatred is evil in itself—a regressive attitude which blinds judgment and leads to the evil consequences of harsh peace terms and continued bitterness between nations. If, as social psychotherapists, we consider the question of attitudes in war-time, we must condemn hatred and try to devise means for reducing its strength. The unconscious causes of hatred are largely beyond our control; but rational analysis of the legend of the hated enemy can show that much of it is without basis in fact.

There seems insufficient ground for supposing that this process, if successful, need lead to any reduction in effective effort towards winning the War, for effective action need not depend on irrational impulses. There are rational as well as irrational grounds for desiring an Allied victory in the War. Irrational hatred of the enemy is generally least strong among front-line fighting troops, probably because these do not suffer from that frustration of the impulse to action against the enemy which raises the sentiment of hatred to pathological intensity. One difference between this War and that of 1914–18 is that there are now far more active participants in the War and therefore fewer people whose aggressive impulses are frustrated. This gives reason for hoping that there will be fewer irrational haters.

Prof. T. H. Pear discussed the psychological implications of "Re-educating the Germans" after the War. Relevant questions were: Which Germans? How? By whom? For how long? If the re-education is to follow a plan, its form will ultimately depend upon the attitude which a small group of leading men has taken up during, as well as immediately after, hostilities. The Nazi youth is a nasty bit of work, but he is a bit of work; and that work was planned. Perhaps some of its methods might be used to achieve results more desirable to us.

Who are "we"? In 1918–19 "we" appear to have been a group of tired men dominated by some who were less tired. To them, perhaps, there seemed to be no means of ascertaining public opinion except by an election. If other means had existed then, it is doubtful if they would have been used. It is difficult, for example, to believe that leading economists advised the Allies that the sums of money demanded by them could be paid.

Psychologists have a duty as well as a right to think psychologically about problems which concern the lives and happiness of millions, and to comment upon the use or misuse of specifically psychological concepts by persons in responsible public positions. If, only a few weeks ago, psychologists had asked, "On what occasions have our spokesmen, when attempting to influence the public on problems concerning the future of the Germans, used psychological terms?" one answer would have been, "On the radio—but not on the Home Programme. At home, through more than half a million copies of 'Black Record'". This brilliantly written and intensely interesting pamphlet distorts history, ethnology, sociology and social psychology in a manner which Dr. Goebbels has made familiar. Lord Vansittart's point of view is that of an extremely small section of English society. He makes practically no reference to the German working class.

On behalf of the Government, however, Lord Simon asserted in the House of Lords on March 10, 1942, that the Hitlerite State should be destroyed but that the whole German people is not thereby doomed to destruction.

No responsible social psychologist, Prof. Pear believes, would claim that the Germans have a special innate tendency to cruelty, possessed by members of no other nation. A particular type of education seems to have been responsible for the abominable behaviour of the Nazis. It is just conceivable that a relatively larger number of Germans than of other 'civilized' nations might have inherited a temperament specially conducive to learning the technique of cruelty, yet selective breeding to that end would take a long time, and so far would have produced no children above the age of ten. An individual's pugnacious tendency might express itself in bestial cruelty, if intelligently trained in selected techniques or merely in sports like boxing and football which are usually admired.

Prof. Pear suggested that Prof. Gordon W. Allport's doctrine of a relatively undifferentiated human drive* later modified by attitudes, sentiments, complexes, techniques, values and interests, explained the facts better than any appeal to a theory of human instincts. Allport considers that the many known facts about animal instincts only confuse the issue, because there is such flexibility in the human learning and breaking of habits, and so much insight, foresight and delay in responses, that human goals are of a different type from the stereotyped goals of animals. In the process of maturing, the dispositions of childhood coalesce into sharper, more distinctive systems of motivation. As they emerge, these personal, unique systems take upon themselves effective driving power, and operate as autonomous motives, different in aim and character from those of juvenile years and very different from the crude tensions of infancy. Blanket terms like 'aggressiveness' confuse too many psychological problems at present.

Prof. Pear deprecated some spatial metaphors in psychology, in such phrases as 'the layers of the mind', 'the depth of aggressive instincts', 'the cultural and therefore more superficial aspects of the individual in relation to society'. A pattern of activities which began because it was prompted by some comparatively primitive incentive may set up a stranglehold in its own right: stamp-collecting and bridge are good examples. The concept of the transformation of human motives seems to him to be most helpful. In war, too, many motives other than the unconscious ones are deliberately harnessed by authority. The desire for money or fame, the wish to obtain approval and to avoid disapproval from those one loves or respects, may be completely conscious and yet may inspire difficult feats. Both the fighter's and the scientist's activities may also show functional autonomy both in peace and war, complicating the problems of post-war reconstruction.

Dr. Ranyard West asked, "What ought we to Think?" He emphasized our large and increasing knowledge of mental attitudes peculiar to certain character-types within all societies. In particular, he stigmatized the role of the 'obsessional' or 'aggressive-obsessional' character both in pre-war and in war-time society. By virtue of the peculiar powers of hatred and passionate loyalty and devotion which the psycho-

analyst now knows them to possess, these individuals are prone to the "black and white" type of thinking which war fosters and which fosters war. But in war-time, obsessional mechanisms of thought also become more apparent among normal men and women. The hideous injuries that in war-time must be suffered by our friends and inflicted upon our enemies virtually give us only two alternatives to "black and white" thought. One is to repudiate aggressive thought and action from religious motives. The other is to understand the inevitability of human prejudice in the presence of emotion. This leads to concentration upon the faulty situation itself.

Racial prejudice has been analysed by Stratton. He finds it nearly or quite universal. But he also claims that it has no innate direction. Nowhere, for example, have white children a 'natural' prejudice against a coloured nurse. It arises not because of any awareness of a difference of race, or even of strangeness, but always because of a feeling of group menace. It is proportionate to the social injury which one race-group believes another may do to it. The physical and cultural characteristics of the hated race thus become merely the signs and badges of an opposing group. The prejudice is a group-reaction to losses threatened or experienced, not inborn, but continued by tradition and by fresh impressions from new harm received.

This analysis transfers the 'racial' problem from a biological into a politico-economic category; and here the present custodian of the race is usually the nation. Nationhood is based upon many factors: geography, language, economy, a common heritage of history and habits. But above all there must be a common interest appreciated as such. "A nation is made and kept by an emotionally sustained education in nationhood. . . . And warfare among civilized nations is no mere persistence of something inborn, but a product and instrument of governmental art." Some of us to-day may be willing to substitute the less ambitious word 'action' for 'art'.

Here we have a welcome emphasis upon contemporary and controllable factors. Our national group-prejudices have their deepest root in the mere group. But in fact the nation State is a very peculiar group, a 'power' group which claims 'sovereign independence' from all other power-groups. The nation binds us first by fostered sentiment and traditional education and common interests. Secondly, it denominates a 'State' which monopolizes collective force within the nation. To the internal power of this State is now conjoined an external aspiration which is essentially undefined and unlimited. The doctrine of 'sovereignty' demands that the nation State itself shall both define and judge its own cause at the one and the same moment—and that moment will be one of intense emotional tension. In final paradox, both the limitless aspiration and the claims of sovereign independence exist in the presence of a real and severe limitation of external power. It is scarcely surprising that our nations come to fear each other.

Dr. West emphasized the fact that the human mind is endowed with ample machinery for maintaining its self-respect but with none for making accurate moral judgments in the face of emotion. He claimed that the distortion of factual judgment, inevitable between individuals, is increased between power-groups (1) because the prejudices become shared, and (2) because they lack the factual correction of third-party judgment and of law. "We have to face the fact that our enemies and we are judging our mutual

* "Personality: A Psychological Interpretation" (Constable). Cf. Pear, T. H., "Are There Human Instincts?" (Manchester University Press (1s. 6d.), and *Bull. John Rylands Library*, 27 (1942).

relationships by a totally different set of 'facts' stretching backwards into the past, as if we saw only the green in a landscape and they saw only the red."

The inevitable prejudice of human judgment finds a corrective in a natural love of justice. But this corrective requires (1) organization and (2) external application. The requisite institutional remedy lies in law, such as we already have it within our nation States. The inevitability of national prejudice requires that such law shall be organized and administered upon a supernational plane.

PHYSICS, MATERIALISM, AND FREE WILL

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SIR JAMES JEANS'S recent book, "Physics and Philosophy", has once more raised the question of the bearing of the 'new physics' upon the philosophical doctrines of metaphysical materialism and human free will. It is not a little odd that at a time when some philosophers are beginning to wonder whether it makes sense to say that materialism is true (or that it is false), and whether, therefore, it makes sense to say that idealism is true (or that it is false), some eminent physicists and mathematicians are asserting that the new physics provides arguments that are very strong, even if not conclusive, in favour of establishing the truth of metaphysical idealism. Thus, for example, Sir James Jeans concludes: "Modern physics is not altogether antagonistic to an objective idealism like that of Hegel"*.

He further contends that the new physics has an important bearing upon the problem of free will.

These two contentions formed the main topic of discussion at the symposium held at a joint meeting of the London and Home Counties Branch of the Institute of Physics, the Aristotelian Society, and the Mind Association, on May 19. I gave the opening paper, which was replied to by Sir James Jeans; Mr. R. B. Braithwaite and Prof. E. T. Whittaker opened the discussion which followed. This article is not a report of the discussion, but an attempt to bring out the main points that were raised.

There is a preliminary question which usually receives far too little discussion, namely, what exactly is the relation of physics and philosophy. Not all philosophers would give the same answer to this question, nor would all physicists. What Sir James Jeans's answer would be is well known; he holds that metaphysics is literally 'beyond physics', so that the decision whether materialism is true or is false is one to be made by physicists. Since it is assumed that the denial of materialism entails the assertion of idealism, it can scarcely be maintained that the physicist *qua* physicist has a right to the last word. Before that last word is said, he must have become a philosopher and have acquired some skill in thinking philosophically. It is also desirable that he should have learnt to avoid the mistakes of earlier philosophers, which have been quite decisively refuted. Certainly any man of science may well be led to reflect upon certain great problems which have traditionally occupied the attention of philosophers

* "Physics and Philosophy", p. 204.

—man's place in the universe, the ultimate nature of things, of matter and of mind, and of their inter-connexion. Such problems have also exercised the minds of some great poets. In what sense these great questions are 'problems' can only be asked at a comparatively late stage of philosophical development. Physicists are sometimes tempted to take short cuts and to say more than they know.

Prof. E. T. Whittaker has made a very pertinent comment in this connexion. He ascribes the extraordinary popularity of the writings of Sir Arthur Eddington and Sir James Jeans not to their eminence as men of science, nor to their powers of exposition, but to the fact that, as he said, "they have a quality which is found, perhaps, most markedly in great poets, of having flashes of insight which reveal to them things which are beyond the range of exact knowledge. Whereas, knowing them to be eminent scientists, we imagine that what we are going to get from them is exact knowledge, we are delighted to find that they have a poetic insight."* This comment seems to me to be just. To keep to the case of Sir James Jeans, his philosophical reaction to 'the implications of the new physics' appears to be largely determined by his feeling that "the new physics shows us a universe which looks as though it might conceivably form a suitable dwelling-place for free men, and not a mere shelter for brutes—a home in which it may at least be possible for us to mould events to our desires and live lives of endeavour and achievement". These are not the remarks of a physicist writing physics; they are the reflexions of a physicist who is attempting to formulate a philosophy of life. It is from this point of view that they must be judged; criteria derived from physics will not suffice.

The old physics (that is, classical physics, which reached its consummation in the nineteenth century) is thought to be inimical to our desires because it is taken to involve the doctrine that the ultimate reality is matter and that mind is a mere epiphenomenon of matter. This doctrine has been associated with a strict determinism, that is, with the view that all events, including human volitions, are causally connected so that our thoughts and feelings could, in principle, be predicted; everything that happens is, in fact, nothing but a mere re-arrangement of the atoms that are the ultimate constituents of the universe, and alone are permanent. The 'prison-house' feeling, or what T. H. Huxley called "the nightmare", has been induced by the reluctant acceptance of materialism in this form together with the strict determinism associated with it.

Anyone who has accepted this metaphysical theory as an inescapable outcome of classical physics will be likely to welcome the new physics as being very relevant to the solution of his problem. It is, however, important to be clear with regard to what exactly the problem is. It appears to be the problem of escaping from the 'prison-house' into a world in which we may hope "to mould events to our desires". If the obstacle to this escape has been the acceptance of the view that the universe 'really' consists of indestructible atoms and that the perceptible variety of things in the universe and the perceptible difference between men, brutes, and, for example, rocks, are

* I quote from a verbatim report of the discussion, kindly provided for me by the chairman of the symposium. Prof. Whittaker went on to say that I had not altogether allowed for this fact. I think he is right in stressing this difference of temperament, and in insisting that I am not in the least 'poetic'. It would be interesting to learn whether Sir Arthur and Sir James are content to regard their excursions into philosophy as mainly poetic in quality.